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**SECTION:** A SECTION; Pg. A01**LENGTH:** 1095 words**HEADLINE:** Panel Cites U.S. Failures On Security for Embassies**BYLINE:** John Mintz, Washington Post Staff Writer**BODY:**

A U.S. government commission appointed to investigate why two U.S. embassies in Africa were vulnerable to terrorist bombings issued a scathing report yesterday, criticizing "the collective failure of the U.S. government over the past decade" to prepare for terrorist attacks and to adequately fund security improvements at American embassies.

"Responsibility for this failure can be attributed to several administrations and their agencies, including the Department of State, National Security Council, and Office of Management and Budget, as well as the U.S. Congress," said the report of the panel, chaired by retired Adm. William J. Crowe, former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

The report, which is to be released today by the State Department, notes that U.S. intelligence agencies detected a number of threats of terrorist strikes against the American embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam in the two years before the nearly simultaneous bombings last Aug. 7 that killed 224 people and wounded 5,000. But the intelligence was too vague to be very useful, the 11-member panel concluded.

Instead, the commission said that U.S. officials have been too reliant on such "warning intelligence," and tended to relax their guard in the absence of intelligence reports describing specific dangers. This has left the country ill-prepared to face "transnational" terrorists such as Osama bin Laden, the Saudi millionaire who U.S. officials believe coordinated the East African attacks, the Crowe report said.

Eleven people have been charged along with bin Laden in federal court in New York in the bombings.

The panel reserved its harshest criticism for U.S. officials' failure to contemplate the possibility of the type of truck bombs that destroyed the two embassies, particularly in light of the 1996 truck bombing of a U.S. Air Force dormitory in Saudi Arabia that killed 19 airmen, and the destruction of the U.S. Marine barracks and the U.S. Embassy in Beirut in 1983.

An official close to Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright said: "As she has said before, she takes responsibility for the failures of the department. She has said and says that terrorism has to be a higher priority, and she has talked to counterparts at other agencies in an effort to take action following this collective failure."

"This is not an easy report" for the Clinton administration, said another senior U.S. official last night. "But our hope is it will help us with addressing the main problem here: an inability to get funding for these security measures."

The Crowe panel, which was appointed by Albright and CIA Director George J. Tenet under a 1996 law requiring such reports after fatal terrorist attacks, recommended that the U.S. government spend \$1.4 billion a year over 10 years to improve security at U.S. diplomatic missions. That is in addition to the \$1.4 billion hurriedly added to the State Department's security budget by Congress and the Clinton administration after the August bombings.

Among its other proposals were a recommendation to bring all overseas U.S. facilities up to the standards recommended in a similar report drawn up in 1985 by a panel headed by former CIA deputy director Bobby Ray Inman. Since then,

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about 15 embassies have been upgraded to Inman's standards — including being set back from public streets and built with sturdy design techniques.

But in the 1980s, Congress and the Office of Management and Budget refused to spend the billions that Inman's proposals required. Since then reductions in the State Department's budget by Congress made the improvements unfeasible, officials have said.

The panel praised Prudence Bushnell, U.S. ambassador to Nairobi, for repeatedly asking superiors at the State Department to build a new embassy there that was up to Inman standards as she became increasingly concerned about the many terrorist threats the embassy was receiving.

She cabled Washington in December 1997 warning of the embassy's "extreme vulnerability," especially because it abuts two of downtown Nairobi's busiest streets, the report said. But officials here replied that because it faced only a "medium" threat of terrorism according to the department's rating system, Nairobi "ranked relatively low among the chancery replacement priorities."

The report concluded that "systemic and institutional failures in Washington were responsible for a flawed process for assessing threat levels worldwide which underestimated the threat of terrorism in Nairobi."

"There was no credible intelligence that provided immediate or tactical warning of the Aug. 7 bombings," the panel said. "A number of earlier intelligence reports cited alleged threats against several U.S. diplomatic and other targets, including the embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam . . . but were largely discounted because of doubts about the sources. Other reporting, while taken seriously, was imprecise, changing and nonspecific as to dates, diminishing its usefulness."

Moreover, the commission found that actions taken by CIA and FBI officials to put pressure on the bin Laden network in Nairobi in 1997 and early 1998, as well as on Al-Haramain, a Saudi charity with alleged terrorist links, lulled U.S. authorities into thinking the threats had dissipated.

"Indeed, for eight months prior to the Aug. 7 bombings, no further intelligence was produced to warn the embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam," it said.

"Intelligence and policy communities relied excessively on tactical intelligence to determine the level of potential terrorist threats to posts worldwide," the report said. "The Inman report noted and previous experience indicates that terrorist attacks are often not preceded by warning intelligence. We cannot count on having such intelligence warn us."

The panel's proposals include an indication of how vulnerable top American officials believe their embassies are — it recommends that all U.S. embassies store evacuation and digging tools, as well as next-of-kin documents about diplomats, in sites away from the embassies.

In a statement attached to the report, Crowe wrote, "Unless these vulnerabilities are addressed on a sustained basis, the lives and safety of U.S. government employees and the public in many of our facilities abroad will continue to be at risk."

"What is most troubling is the failure of the U.S. government to take the necessary steps to prevent such tragedies through an unwillingness to give sustained priority and fund to security improvements," he added.

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